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ABSTRACT

A case study of the experiences of a Native American teacher (Joseph) during his first year of teaching examined the transition from the idealistic world of college to the stark realities of actual teaching. Data were gathered through bimonthly semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and telephone communication. Joseph picked a reservation school to teach in because his grandfather had come from the same community. Deeply grounded in the community and his own heritage, Joseph understood the learning styles of Native American students, which he described as "step-by-step" and "beating around the bush." Because of this knowledge, Joseph was able to adapt the strategies he learned at the university, which were centered around white middle-class experiences, to his reservation setting. Joseph sought support from the teacher next door, a Navajo custodian, other colleagues, his professor at the university, and his parents. He felt that the ideal support for a first-year teacher would be a trained instructional classroom assistant who could reinforce student learning. His biggest challenge was inadequate instructional materials. Much of Joseph's success can be attributed to the high standards and expectations he set for himself and his students. He showed his students through his actions that he would not give up on them; he challenged without embarrassing, empathized, and developed strategies for his students. Joseph exemplifies the teacher needed in schools today. (TD)

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Returning to the Reservation: Experiences of A First Year Native American Teacher

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Returning to the Reservation:
Experiences of a First Year Native American Teacher

Attention paid to culture during teacher training is often absent in any kind of systematic support for the relationship between new teachers and culture. "Scholars studying new teacher induction have produced little research addressing the system's treatment or lack of treatment of minorities" (Kestner, 1994, p. 4). This research reports the experiences of a Native American who has returned to a reservation school as a first year teacher. Interviews were one aspect of data collection for his story.

Introduction - Ya'ahteeh

Joseph: "...I'm not gonna let my students go through what I went through...where I was kind of misunderstood, where I was labeled, where I was, not mistreated, but...kind of like being cheated at or cheated on, something like that."

Interviewer: "In your school...throughout your school?"

Joseph: "school, throughout my school year and wherever I went"

Int: "And do you feel like you were labeled?"

Joseph: "Um, hmm. Seems like at times I was rushed. And I kind of learned things slowly and step by step. Have to go over it again, over it again, to see if I can get it...sometimes I'm an independent worker. Sometimes I do group work...the one thing that I do a lot is I do a lot of translation; Navajo to English, English to Navajo. And that's why sometimes I don't respond quick enough (snickers), or quickly because I'm revising my words at the same time I'm speaking. And back then I was told, 'can't think that way. You can't do things that way. They're gonna call you a dumb person,' something like that"

Int: "The teacher said that?"

Joseph: "Uh, huh. So I try to do a lot of things differently, how to approach my students, how to handle certain situations"

Int: "Because of your own experiences?"

Joseph: "Uh, huh. So this time we went through things slowly."

Ayers (1998) writes of the paradoxical natures of the field when he states, "education frees the mind, but schooling bureaucratizes the brain" (p. xxiii). One of the most difficult transitions for preservice teachers is the leap from the idealistic world of college education to the often stark realities of the public elementary classroom. Yet literature regarding the preparation of preservice teachers, particularly for cultural diversity is scant. According to Giroux and MacLaren (1986), teacher educators must address the ability of preservice and inservice teachers to foster empowerment and voice. The voices of those who traditionally have not been heard provide a way to reform the underlying goals of education, as a personal and social endeavor and a way to affirm diversity. Centering the pedagogy and practice of education involves including and situating pedagogy and practice of education authentically in relation to one's own culture and background of experiences. Such centering reinforces the idea that individuals are the only authorities of their own experiences and understandings (Dillard, 1997).

In their review of research on learning to teach, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon (1998) found few longitudinal studies on the formal aspects of learning to teach and a lack of attention to cultural issues and new teachers. The studies they reviewed pointed to a common theme, "an incongruity between the preservice year and the first year of teaching" (p. 157).

Areas made salient by Kestner's (1994) review of literature address the lack of attention to minority concerns and the call for design studies to determine proposals for new teacher induction. My research attempts to bridge this gap by documenting the experiences of a first year, Native American teacher and is an attempt to interrupt the alienation experienced by students as they move from student to first year teacher.

The purpose of my study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Native American first year teachers in transition from preservice teacher education to professional positions teaching in reservation schools. The following research questions guided my work. 1) What are the perceptions about the first year of teaching? 2) What kind of insights and experiences characterize first year Native American teachers? 3) How do these teachers reflect on their on-campus preparation? 4) What kind of support do beginning Native American teachers feel they need?

Literature Review

Ladson-Billings (2000) contends that while some of the new literature addresses the needs of non-white students, some has compressed the experience of all non-white groups into a singular category of 'other,' without recognizing the particularity of cultural experiences. It is important for teachers to understand the specific and unique qualities of each culture, especially the culture of the students they teach.

According to a 1993 report of the American Council on Education, "American Indians persist in college at the lowest rate of all post-secondary entrants" (Carter & Wilson, 1993, p. 4). More recent reports found a rise in enrollment and graduation rates in the early 1990's, but Native Americans continue to lag behind Black, Hispanic, and Asian American students (Boyer, 1997). For years educators understood that the transition to

college for many Native American students has been an upsetting and confusing experience as they are challenged by a different culture, values, and expectations. Sander (1987) reported that much of what Indians find in non-Indian educational institutions are contrary to the social norms, self-perceptions, and expected behaviors that have been reinforced in their own cultural communities. Those who persisted in college often reflect on the inferiority and sense of isolation they experienced.

The body of research which examined learning styles of American Indian students does bring together evidence that suggests common patterns in the way these students come to understand the world. They approach tasks visually, learning by careful observation and in their natural settings experientially (Swisher & Deyhle, 1989). Leacock (1976) provided a strong rationale for understanding culture and its influence on instruction. She contends that true 'cultural insight' allows one to look beyond the differences and socially determined integrity of the individuals, preventing misinterpretation of behaviors. Leacock (1976) also comments that cultural differences are often misinterpreted, as the lens through which the teacher views the behavior is colored by atypical behavior used as prototypes in the teacher training process.

Traditionally, education for Native Americans in American public schools has been an attempt to convey the knowledge of the dominant culture. "Compulsory education has been a major factor in removing the Indian from a tight-knit tribal world and throwing him into an intensely individualistic one without the necessary cultural defenses to survive psychologically" (Reyhner, 1981,p. 20). Reyhner (1981) also suggests a need for intercultural communication, in which both sides are willing to learn from each other. Anglos must be aware of the myriad knowledge they can learn from Native Americans,

while the idea that Native Americans can learn from anglos without committing psychological or ethnic suicide must be communicated to the Native Americans. Cross cultural education recognizes the values of the native cultures and trusts those values to come forth in locally controlled schools. Native Americans who have successfully completed university teacher education programs can act as translators, interpreters of the dominant culture.

First Year Teachers

Most teachers believe and numerous studies support that beginning teachers really learn how to teach during their first year of teaching (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, Moon, 1998; Bullough & Baughmann, 1997). These writers describe the initial year as one of 'culture shock,' with many teachers finding their preservice education classes often in stark reality to what's actually happening in the schools. Many find teaching much more difficult than they ever imagined, describing classroom management (control) as their overwhelming concern and challenge. Unlike their novice counterparts in medicine, law, and accounting, who gradually assume responsibilities, new teachers immediately assume the same responsibilities as veteran teachers (Kestner, 1994). A 'sink or swim' mentality continues to exist despite decades of research that point to the importance of mentoring support with more experienced teachers at the school or with university faculty.

In their article, "Breaking Through Isolation With New Teacher Groups," Rogers and Babinski (1999) contend that while listening to other teachers is valuable, sharing personal stories helps new teachers better understand themselves. Many new teachers have lots of opportunities to listen to others but have no one to listen to them. They may find support in family or friends, who, though well intentioned, do not have the experience in teaching

needed to truly empathize about school issues. This group discovered the power in providing regular opportunities for new teachers to thoughtfully and seriously discuss their work.

Field Work Methods

Participants for this research study were recruited from a list made available from the student services office of recent Native American elementary education graduates, beginning their first year as teachers in reservation schools. My intent was to follow two or three new teachers through their first year of teaching. I planned to collect my data through: 1) periodic, on-site interviews; 2) reflective journals maintained by the participants; and 3) regular email, written correspondence or telephone conversations. Given the constraints of doing research on the reservation, irregularity of phone access and email, I planned to use a variety of strategies to gather the data.

After obtaining a list of recent Native American graduates I drafted a letter, explaining my research and requesting their participation. Being fairly new to the university, I knew only one of the students on a personal basis. I talked with other professors who recommended students they thought might be enthusiastic candidates for my project. Encouraged by my colleagues, I sent off four letters and waited, with no replies.

I was just beginning to learn about the obstacles of gaining access to the reservation. Many of the people have no phones or email so any telephone contact had to be made through the school. I was also feeling that my anonymity as a new professor was another roadblock, having almost no connection with the people I was attempting to contact. A bit discouraged, I persevered with contact attempts mostly by making phone calls to the schools, even though it was summer vacation. Three first year teachers were initially

involved in my research. This article is based on my experience with one teacher participant.

Struggling with the initial contact process I read Cheryl Crazy Bull's (1997) article, "Advice for the non-Native Researcher" in *Tribal College Journal*. She believes that outside researchers' methods are often insensitive to the community, which I imagine have been the experiences of many Native Americans, adding to their already cautious nature about Anglos and instrusive researchers. Crazy-Bull emphasizes the importance of good working relationships with the people by making a lifelong commitment to the relationships; not just for the time period that they meet one's research needs. Throughout the year I learned more about the importance of building trusting relationships and community-based, participatory research, also described by Crazy-Bull, that validates tribal knowledge and tribal practices to the benefit of the research process and the researcher.

Data Collection

My study was based on one academic year of data collection. The process for collecting data consisted of interviews, classroom observations, and telephone communication. I designed an informal interview protocol to ensure that some uniformity existed across the interviews. I planned for the on-site interviews to be informal, open-ended and audiotaped, on a regular bi-monthly basis. Because I was most interested in hearing their stories, I planned on using semi-structured interviewing techniques as described by Reinharz (1992) and Gilligan (1982). Grounded in critical theory, feminist literature, and writing on cultural identity, semistructured or unstructured interviewing is a qualitative data-gathering technique that has become the principal means by which

researchers seek to gain active involvement of respondents in the construction of data about their lives (Reinharz, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). In this approach, the researcher plans to ask questions about a given topic but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained. To encourage the development of trust, some researchers define themselves as learners and listeners rather than "researchers," encouraging the participants to tell stories. Power becomes shared and the interview becomes a dialogue rather than an interrogation. Self-disclosure initiates "true dialogue" by allowing participants to become 'co-researchers'" (Bombyk, Bricker-Jenkins, & Wedenoja, 1985).

Maintaining contact with the participants proved to be a real challenge. Two participants stayed in the project until the winter holidays and then seemed unable to continue possibly due to the overwhelming demands of novice teachers. Given the difficulties of data gathering, a type of case study seemed appropriate. One person, Joseph, stayed in touch with me throughout the year. I appreciated his perseverance in taking time from a new and demanding teaching position to talk with me. We were beginning to build the trusting relationship, and friendship, described by Crazy-Bull (1997). This is his story.

Joseph - A Vision Quest

"I guess somewhere along the highway to the university I said I'll be a teacher," Joseph light-heartedly commented during our first conversation in early August. Beginning his college career as a psychology major at Dine College, formerly Navajo Community College, he claimed that "somewhere along the highway, I changed my mind to elementary education. Maybe it is because the majority of my family, my relatives, are teachers."

Prior to his college career, Joseph had numerous experiences working with children during the summer as a school volunteer, physical education teacher, and teacher's assistant at his community school. "I taught them how to drum, how to sing, what the drum means, what a song means and what kind of songs to sing about certain dances that the kids were in."

Upon acceptance into the teacher education program at the university, Joseph selected the professional development (school partnership) rather than traditional program because, "I'm always trying to challenge myself," he said. In the partnership program students work in classrooms on a daily basis as well as participate in university classes provided, on site, at a local elementary school. On the first day he discovered he was the only Native American and one of three males in a class of seventeen. "I thought about changing schools but then I said, 'nah,' I want to see how far I can take this so I stuck with it for both semesters and when student teaching came around I said I want to go back to the reservation to see if I can incorporate what I learned at the university and with Sarah Shumer."

Joseph described his desire to return to the reservation "like a 'vision quest' for what I've been doing. I picked Chapman for a reason. My late grandfather was from here and I wanted to know the family, the relatives, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that he grew up with, I wanted to know that side of the family. There was one goal." And the other goal was "to see if what Dr. Shumer taught us will work here."

Joseph has a welcoming appearance with his smooth, round face, long, jet black hair, often pulled back in a ponytail, and striking yet gentle brown eyes that sometimes hide his mischievous nature. At the beginning of our second interview, in October, I questioned,

"Why don't you just kind of tell me about how things have been going. What things do you feel have gone well; what didn't go well." "Well, first of all, do you have enough tape?" Joseph retorted.

Joseph who is half Navajo, half Apache, claims that his hero is Jim Chee, a character in the popular Tony Hillerman novels, and proudly shares that his great-great grandmother once roamed with Geronimo. Pride in his culture is a significant part of who Joseph is. Having grown up in a loving, traditional family in this rural Arizona community, Joseph maintains his rich heritage as a dancer and a drummer. He exemplifies the quiet warrior, as defined in the Navajo tradition (Bennett, 1990), reflecting the dignified, courageous endurance of his people. He has many role models who traveled the highways before him. Among them, Chief Barbocinto who voluntarily turned himself over to U.S. troops so he could accompany his people on the Long Walk to Fort Sumner; the Walk that included nine thousand Navajos who began the forced march with half never returning to their beloved homeland.

Setting: A Land of Contrasts

Heat rising off the pavement, swirling upward toward blue sky, creates a mirage of endless water as one negotiates the highway that winds through the northeastern corner of Arizona. While dust devils, swirling across the dramatic yet tranquil earth provide a gentle reminder of this desert landscape. The striking vistas, the grandeur of the mesas and red spires, dramatically rising from the earth, and the little hogans, dotting the landscape, increase the sense of contrasts in this magnificent land.

Life on the highway is fast, with tourists speeding to Monument Valley or Canyon de Chelly. Busloads of senior citizens stop at the Burger King, a common lunch choice for

many Americans but unique at this particular location. This is the home of the Navajo Code Talkers (America's Greatest Secret Weapon) Exhibit, a tribute to the more than 400 Navajo men who served with the Marines in the Pacific during World War II. This brave group of men devised a code based on the Navajo language, a code that proved to unbreakable. Because of them the United States was able to communicate without the enemy understanding the messages (Aaseng, 1992). As people bustle into the Burger King, they all seem to take a minute, at least, to ponder respectfully at the exhibit.

Tourists are also often unaware of the native people, quietly moving along the edge of the highway, often herding their sheep. Their paths are slow, traditional, another contrast to the busy highway negotiated by travelers. The dramatic landscape, the quiet footsteps of the people treading the paths of the ancient ones, the Code Talker Exhibit reflect the quiet dignity of the non-warring people who live here, the Navajo.

Traveling down the highway, it would be easy to miss the turn-off to Chapman Boarding School. The shining silver water tower, sparkling against the blue sky, provides a guiding landmark. The school is nestled in a grove of cottonwood trees, a welcome oasis after negotiating the dusty, winding trail leading to it. There are numerous buildings, many of them dormitories for the students who live here during the week, as many of their ancestors did who came before. Unlike their ancestors, many of these children are fortunate enough to be able to spend weekends at home with their families, traveling to school to live in the dorms for weekday classes only.

The scene outside Joseph's seventh grade classroom window commands a spectacular view of distant mesas, endless blue sky and white, rolling clouds. A gentle breeze, often

blowing in the cottonwood trees, and a dilapidated fence soften the desert landscape, providing a certain coziness to the classroom.

The mission statement of the Boarding School states that "together in beauty, we learn, grow, and achieve," while the message winding across Joseph's computer screen is a reminder not to take things too seriously, "Old I'Ndn Wise Man Says, 'Be Proud, Be Honest, and Enjoy A Good Bowl of Mutton Stew.'"

Pedagogical Struggles: Successes and Challenges

Several patterns emerged in observations and interviews with Joseph during the school year. I have chosen to describe the ones that I believe most salient and significant for other teachers. Both successes and challenges were noted. Successes included: a positive viewpoint looking beyond labels, knowing the children, their learning styles, and their culture, numerous opportunities for self-expression and integration of academics, challenging students who wanted to 'have it their way,' and support for the teacher. Joseph's wonderful sense of humor was also key in his survival and these comments are threaded throughout the paper. Joseph's primary struggle was the limited availability or total lack of instructional resources. Classroom management appeared to be both a challenge and success. Successes and struggles are also noted regarding his university teaching preparation.

Help students challenge themselves

Joseph: "...but like I said I even told her (the principal) that I want to find out things about my kids. I don't want to see the bad of them. I know that there is the good side, too. Like some of my students that are being labeled as a dysfunctional person or a bad

kid or something like that. They're really talented. They may have behavior problems, discipline problems, but in here they are smart."

Many of Joseph's personal school experiences have molded him into the kind of teacher he wants to be. A theme running throughout our discussions is desire to 'reach the students,' to put himself in their shoes, to find out what really interests them and build on that. He is always cognizant of the power of labels. "I don't want to label them... I noticed that when you label a kid it gets stuck in their mind psychologically. I don't want to do that because I went through that and they always told me I was a slow reader. With that in mind I didn't challenge myself." Finally he encountered that one, memorable teacher who told him he could do better. "You can do better, you are smart, you are creative, you can do better," she told him. "She told me to challenge myself and I'll never forget that. She gave me a 'wake-up' call and that's what I want to do with my kids - challenge them."

Learning Styles and Strategies

Joseph often described his application of learning from his preservice education classes. "How am I gonna reach them" was constantly on his mind. In February he shared that he looked back at his college notes from classes and teachers he had worked with in his PDS program and re-evaluated based on what was going on with his students.

He also talked about adapting what he learned about lesson plans to his real life classroom. "My lesson plans really have to be specific. It's a good thing I got some lesson plan tips from Dr. Shumer (and the teachers in the PDS program)," he shared. In March Joseph was continuing to adapt in order to be more sensitive to his students' learning styles. Now he was spending a whole day on science, a whole day on math, etc.

Initially his class went through the typical day of time slots for each subject but he found there wasn't enough time, with everything becoming rushed rather than focused. After instituting his whole day subjects "it became a lot easier for me," he shared. Again his procedures are validated by Cunningham and Allington (1999) who describe the tremendous challenges faced by intermediate teachers of struggling learners and contend that larger blocks of time are needed for intermediate students to pursue reading, writing and research.

Attendance

Regular attendance by the students is an on-going concern for Joseph who saw the capabilities of his students compromised as they missed numerous classes. Their reasons for absence are legitimate, but pose another struggle in their attempts to live in two worlds; the cultural world of the Navajo and the academic world of the American education system. Many of these students have multiple responsibilities outside of school, helping with household chores, taking care of livestock, etc. Children are often required to assist with intricate ceremonial preparations at home. If there is a death in the family, students will be absent for extended periods of time. And some miss school because they have the responsibility of younger siblings at home. Joseph told his students, "that being in school is important. If they're babysitting and if they want to bring in their cousins, their sister, their brother or whatever child that they're taking care of, bring it in and let us take care of it while you are in school."

Role Models

In his continuous struggles to develop strategies for success, Joseph invited the students to bring in pictures of their role models. A poster of Michael Jordan has a

prominent place on the classroom wall. Music is an important part of Joseph's life. And one of the musical role models for him is KISS. "They have really weird titles but the songs are good. They were the backbones of heavy metal. They helped a lot of bands that you know now," he shared with his students. The students said, "Name one." "Garth Brooks. He has KISS posters in his dressing room. He even recorded a KISS song when they were making a tribute to KISS," said Joseph. And the animated discussion continued with enthusiastic questions from the students and informed responses from their teacher. "How do you know about this?" they (students) questioned. "I say, I read about them," Joseph replied.

Joseph continued. "Sometimes I will be walking in here singing a song, like the palace songs, Native American songs, and my students will come in and they will look at me." "You are weird, Mr. J," they say. "Or they will come in and catch me listening to Hopi music and they ask if I have a favorite song. I start naming all these bands. Just this morning they caught me with classical songs; some Mozart pieces. So I guess by doing that they are trying to figure me out; what kind of a person I am. And every day they find me strange and every day they get to know me, a little bit of my personality, I guess." And they are always telling me, "Mr. J, how come you aren't like other teachers?"

Integrating Music, Writing, and Self-Expression

Encouraged by the lively musical discussions and always searching for ways to make reading and writing meaningful, Joseph decided to build on his students' interests as he continued to "push them to do their writing." He asked the students to bring in a song they liked. In class he asked them to respond, in writing, to the song, what did they think of this song? What did they think it means? What pictures did they see when they heard

their favorite song? Not surprisingly, he found that most of the writing was about emotions. One student described a song, about how life can change so fast and how life can end so easily. "This child comes from a troubled family," Joseph explained. Rather than being alarmed, Joseph took this opportunity to encourage the student, to help him further articulate his feelings. Another student said she saw herself singing the same song, but singing to Navajo students. "Cool!" Joseph remarked. "So that's the kind of response I was looking for and then I say, 'good, I at least reached two people now.'"

Cunningham and Allington (1999), in their book, *Classrooms That Work*, suggest that the differences in instructional programs for good and poor readers becomes evident in grades four through six. Children who are successful readers spend more time engaged in real reading and writing while those who have been unsuccessful will be discouraged and not spend time engaged in meaningful reading. Joseph seemed to be in the situation they described. He was the intermediate teacher faced with the difficult challenge of not only developing positive attitudes toward reading and writing but also transforming often negative and hostile attitudes of these children toward reading and writing. "This is not an easy task and can require a great deal of determination and stamina" (Cunningham & Allington, 1999, p. 36).

Learning, Step by Step

In thinking about his students, Joseph often reflected on his own learning style. He often shared that sometimes he felt rushed in school. "I kind of learned things slowly and step by step and have to go over it again and again to see if I can get it," partly due to his language translation and retranslation. Based on his experiences he 'tried to do a lot of things differently and went through things slowly.' He often described his own reflections

on his practice, that sometimes he stayed up at night thinking about strategies to not only reach the children but present the material in an interesting fashion, one that would be meaningful to them and in a way they would understand it.

Throughout the year Joseph worked on learning strategies with the students, for example, explaining and clarifying assignments three or four times, proceeding through the work, 'step by step,' as he termed it. If the children didn't understand the material at first they would "get headaches or start crying. One of my students said, in a tearful voice, 'Mr. J, I can't do this anymore.'" In his 'step by step' style, Joseph explained that first they would do the work as a group, then individually or paired with a partner. He found partner sharing, or peer tutoring, the most helpful in that they could help each other work out the problems as they explained their understandings to each other.

Joseph frequently shared about modifications he often found himself making in his teaching, again, reflecting on his preservice experiences. "I had to change them, the tactics that I used, to work with Native American students. There's a difference in how to approach non-native to native students. And with the native students it seems like you have to kind of like, beat around the bush for a while before you get to the point," he explained. Joseph continued, "There's certain questions that a non-native would ask where it will conflict with the culture, with values, how the Indian, how the Navajo values what they see and how non-Indians value what they see. So I guess that's where the conflict starts, and if they don't really understand, they'll have a hard time. Like I said, I had to beat around the bush, come up with examples, and that's when they go, 'Oh, ok, I get it now.' Then they'll do their work."

In one particular situation he explained that he could see, by the looks on their faces, that the students were lost. "So I start explaining everything step by step, two, three, four times," Joseph shared. He also noted that some of them were playing around a lot, a pattern he had been trying to break since the beginning of the year. This time Joseph directed, "...you do it on your own this time. Leave me out of this." And the some of the children responded, "but you're our teacher. How come you're not helping?" "What were you doing when I was explaining all of this again, again, and again?" he replied, "What were you doing and what were you thinking? If you don't remember, that means you weren't listening to me." In discussion with me, Joseph shared, "I guess nobody really ...did that to them. They just more likely had it their own way, got things their own way, and got help from certain people and got away with it. But I told them, in here, they're on their own. If I go beyond five times explaining, they're on their own. Ask one of your peers."

Know the Students and Help Them To Challenge Themselves

As Joseph often speaks of 'challenging himself,' so, too, did he expect his students to 'challenge themselves.' Yet in his first year he encountered students who 'wanted to have it their way,' as he termed it, also one of the primary, if not the primary, concern of first year teachers everywhere, classroom management. In speaking of his first grade student teaching experience at the same school, he described, "When I first came here to Chapman, the kids tested me. They tried every which way they can but I started teaching and by the time I left, those that were considered troublemakers understood me and they knew which buttons to push and which buttons not to push."

However, in his own classroom, with twenty-three seventh graders the behavior patterns of the students were more entrenched and his challenge of classroom management, a daunting one. During our second interview in October Joseph shared that during the first three weeks of school, "they tried to have it their way. They tried and I think because of that I'm growing my wrinkles again," Joseph quirked. He told the students "that nothing gets by me," and also remarked that "if you have too many rules, they tend to challenge and it takes a lot of your time to correct." They have settled down, from my observations and I tell them nothing gets by me...So I just had a few rules. I just told them that each rule is up to their own; it's their choice and these rules have consequences."

But then he also learned that a prerequisite for abiding by these rules, building classroom community, was his ability to know and understand his students on a personal level; to let them know he cared. His students come from a variety of different families and "so whatever the problem is at home, they bring it to school." Yet he tried to understand that it was difficult for them to leave their problems at home.

Early in the fall one student "tried to have the last word. I guess because he comes from a broken family. A lot of domestic violence, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and he is trying to adjust to a new home right now with his aunt. I told him to do his work and he just threw it right down at me...I started walking around the class. Once I started walking he said something to me. So I went back and I said, 'what did you say to me?' In a way, I think I stepped over his line by saying that and he wouldn't say. So I just started walking around again. Once I turned around he called me some names in Navajo. So I went back and I said, 'I want you to stand up and say it louder.' And I stood there and he

started calling me names and I just stood there calmly and asked him to restrain himself from any other words and just to cool down. And the whole class saw it, he tried to be the 'macho man' like some of the kids do. So I stood my ground and I just said, 'OK, he wants a challenge,' so I challenged him. And he ended up just bursting into tears. So then I just walked off and I let him have his time out. He freaked out on me later that afternoon and then I talked to him calmly. He said, 'How come what happened this morning didn't bother you?' And I just told him that I know some things about his family and how things are at home and that I don't take things personally and that I kind of told him that it was best for him to let some things out instead of holding it back. And he said, "Well, it's a good thing you did that because I have a lot of things on my mind."

Joseph wanted his students to know that whatever problem came up, they would deal with it in class. Again, he incorporated personal writing to help accomplish this goal. On Mondays and Fridays the students wrote "Dear Teacher" letters in which they described what they wanted to accomplish for the upcoming week, reflected on their work and achievements, or "if they have a problem and want to talk to somebody," shared Joseph. "Then I read them myself and just my eyes see it." He used the 'Dear Teacher' letters in planning for parent teacher conferences, directing the students to write about what they wanted him to tell their parents, specifically, "one thing that I should mention to your parents that you are proud of, that your parents would like to hear," as well as the grade they thought they deserved and why.

A Variety of Supports

When I inquired about the support he received, both in his college work as well as his new teaching experiences Joseph humorously responded, "I talk to myself a lot!" In a

more serious vein he shared, "I get help from people that I know, and one thing that I learned at the university, was, if you're a teacher, not to take things personally."

He described the teachers on his staff as friendly and helpful yet indicated his cautious attitude at first. He described the Navajo cultural teacher who helped him as well as a colleague who was quite proficient with technology. As the year progressed, he found himself often in conversation with the teacher next door, particularly because he felt their views and philosophies were similar. He described her "like a teammate." "I do talk to some other teachers but not the deep conversations that I have with her," he continued.

Another interesting support was provided by one of the school custodians, who spoke only Navajo. Joseph enjoyed talking with him about "school then, school now," as he termed it. Having never attended a school of any kind, the custodian taught himself to read and write. "He's an interesting guy," Joseph remarked, and "one of my favorite elders."

He also knew that he could look to some of his university professors, particularly Sarah Shumer, his primary instructor in the partnership program, who often talked with him by phone offering support and guidance, especially with some difficult situations.

Perhaps, most importantly, Joseph seemed to know that he could always call home. His parents were there for him, particularly his mother, a guidance counselor herself "who had a good time listening to his stories," he said. Both of his parents continue to encourage his educational aspirations.

When I asked about additional supports that he thought might be helpful, he indicated the desire for a trained instructional assistant in the classroom, one who could really work with the students as needed.

College Preparation

In reflecting on his college experiences Joseph often recounted the difficulties he faced as a second language learner; Navajo is his first language. When teachers were speaking in English, Joseph would have to translate into Navajo to understand the conversation then re-translate into English in order to respond. Translating and re-translating made classwork and homework difficult and time consuming. Some of his instructors were understanding and tried to help him, while others were not. Joseph recalled a conversation with one professor in particular about his language challenges. The professor remarked, "Just do the best you can." And Joseph shared that he kind of questioned that remark but thought it best not to respond. "What my parents taught me, what my grandparents taught me, if somebody says that, you just have to take it and not react; it will confuse the thinking process, I don't know how you call it or what you call it. You try to not react because sometimes your reaction is the wrong one."

When I asked Joseph about his recommendations for colleges working with Native American students he replied, "I guess to understand Native Americans, each community or each reservation or each Native American is different, depending on how they were raised. Probably an understanding of their culture or an understanding of who they are because some of these Native Americans don't know who they are even though they are Indians or they belong to a tribe. All they could identify themselves with is that they are a tribe and that sometimes they're looking for some sort of comfort or some sort of help. Sometimes these departments can bring that help, not that they don't have it, just understanding the part and that some of these Native Americans are excellent learners but they have a thinking process, like I do, translating back and forth in two languages."

Joseph's college experiences were positive ones, for the most part. The sense of isolation, often described by many Native American students, did not seem to be an issue for him. He had his loving family to rely on for support, particularly his mother who listened and offered encouragement which helped sustain him through the difficult times. "I always called home when I had troubles. My Mom would help me out. She understood what I was going through because she went through the same thing." Joseph found professors who were understanding and helpful and professors who were not so understanding and talked down to him which made some of his classes easier and some more difficult. The understanding professors and his supportive family provided the bridge he needed between home and school to keep going.

Joseph was in a PDS program which was helpful in that he had many opportunities to work with teachers and children in a real life context. Describing himself as more of a 'hands-on' learner, Joseph believes the PDS program and the guidance of Dr. Sarah Shumer, pulled him through. In our conversations he always referred to his thoughts about being able to adapt what he was learning in this fairly affluent, middle class school to his school on the reservation. He talked with Dr. Shumer about this. "OK, shared reading or writing, how could I incorporate this for the Navajo kids because there is a big difference between a university town and here on the reservation," he reflected.

Conclusion

Joseph described his first year of teaching as a challenging one but looks forward, confidently, to next year. "I have gotten my groove, I guess you can call it, because I'll know what to do, I'll know what not to do," he reflected.

"What's been the easy part," I questioned. "I don't know what the easy part is," he retorted. For a variety of reasons, Joseph's transition from the world of preservice education to the real world of teaching did not seem to be quite as dramatic as often described in the literature (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998).

Always positive in his outlook, Joseph commented that he celebrated the little successes along the way, particularly when he felt he had reached a student. Though discouraged and challenged at times (during our meeting in February I commented that I had never seen him look so tired; he agreed) he always managed to pick himself up, often with the assistance of supportive colleagues, professors, and family, as he continued on his path to reach his students, step by step. Woven throughout our discussions were his recurring optimistic reflections, "I managed to reach a few of them this week. Ok, I can see that this student is really working hard, I see that this person is trying to make the best effort of their learning, and I see there's nothing changing with this person. Now how can I get this person interested?"

Joseph understood the learning styles of Native American students, which he often described as 'step by step,' and 'beating around the bush,' reflective of the visual, careful observation patterns noted by Swisher and Dehyle (1989). Coming from the same community as his students and deeply grounded in his own heritage, Joseph exhibited true cultural insight (Leacock, 1976; Ladson-Billings, 2000) in that he was able to understand student behaviors and learning styles. He used his own school experiences, both positive and negative, to inform his teaching. Many times his schoolwork had seemed rushed. He described his own learning style as a step by step process, often having to review the

material many times, particularly when he had to do so much translation during his early years at the university.

Reflecting on his university experiences he explained that he was "grateful" that he had taken certain courses, not only his teaching methods in the partnership program but also his on-campus courses in psychology, which he often drew upon given the numerous behavioral and emotional challenges he faced with some of his students.

His university experiences, particularly the professional development program, were definitely centered in a white middle class community, posing different opportunities and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Because Joseph was so knowledgeable about the learning styles of Native Americans, I believe, he was able to adapt the strategies he learned at the university to his reservation setting. I often wondered about preservice native students who were not as grounded in their culture as Joseph, and who did not receive the needed attention to culture during teacher training as described by Kestner, (1994). Again, as supported in the literature, teacher education must address the ability of preservice and inservice teachers to foster empowerment and voice as a way to affirm diversity. Pedagogy must be centered in relation to one's own culture and background of experiences (Giroux & MacLaren, 1986; Dillard, 1997) which would seem to support the need for more professionally relevant courses and practicum experiences.

Joseph also sought out and received support from numerous sources; his teammate teacher next door, the Navajo custodian, other colleagues, Dr. Shumer at the university, and his parents. He was never afraid to ask for help when he needed it. During the course of his university work he talked about some professors who were helpful and some who were not, some who talked down to native students. The nurturing professors, whom he

sought out, along with his parents, helped build and maintain a bridge of support for Joseph as he continued to maintain his determination to become a teacher. This support provided the defenses he needed to survive in two worlds, as described by Reyhner (1981).

When questioned about types of support he thought would be ideal for a first year teacher, he expressed the desire for a trained, instructional classroom assistant who would be able to provide the reinforcement of learning often needed by many of the students. And always, his biggest challenge, seemed to be his outdated or complete lack of instructional materials. On one day he commented, dejectedly, that he felt his students were cheated because their school lacked internet connections and were missing out on what seemed available to every other student in the U.S.

It also seems that a big part of Joseph's success can be attributed to the high standards and expectations he set for himself and his students, as he constantly sought to 'challenge himself,' as he often described, and which he, in turn, expected his students to do. He walked his talk, showing his students, though his actions, that he wasn't going to give up on them and neither were they going to give up on themselves. He challenged yet did not embarrass, the student who called him names in Navajo. He empathized with and developed strategies for the little girl who cried, "Mr. J, I can't do this anymore."

Joseph exemplifies the teacher so critically needed in schools today as described by Bullough and Baughmann (1997). They contend that indifference in our postmodern world is an imminent concern, with so many students labeled, sorted, and tracked in our schools. It would be easy, they say, for teachers not to actively care for the students they teach. Yet we know that today, perhaps more than ever, students need morally grounded,

knowledgeable teachers, among other caring adults, who hold them accountable for their actions (Lasch, 1978). They prove they are trustworthy and that justice will be served because they are adults who serve it. They are adults who proved themselves worthy guides for whom genuine human standards are taken seriously and respected but applied sensitively and intelligently, as demanded by an abiding concern for the individual child's future and particularity (Bullough & Baughmann, 1997).

One of Joseph's proudest moments was when he shared his experience with his students and the movie, *Stand and Deliver*. As usual, I had asked him about his teaching, and in his typical, mischievous fashion he replied, "I've been watching a lot of educational movies; just kidding." We laughed. However, he was amazed at his students' reactions when together they watched *Stand and Deliver*. Initially Joseph directed the students to observe closely the students in the movie as well as their teacher. "Throughout that whole movie they were quiet," he shared, "and if one of them speaks, they would just jump on that other person to make them be quiet. So I think they were relating themselves with the characters; I could see the smiles on their faces," as he heard them saying, "there's Mr. J!" "That's how they see me," he explained. And during lunch time one of the students remarked, "You know what? in a way Mr.Escalante, the way he is, that's how you are, too," to which Joseph retorted, "Really?!" The conversation continued with the children explaining that Mr.Escalante was hard on his students, like Mr. J, because it was for their own good. Joseph replied, "I was like, whooaaa, I'm reaching somebody here!"

Joseph exhibits the strong, courageous yet gentle qualities of his ancestral warriors. His step by step illustrations, often documenting his struggles, seem reminiscent of the quiet steps of ancient ones who have gone before, though challenged many times, always

proceeding in a determined, continuous forward direction. Joseph's dedication and perseverance is a tribute to his students, his family, and the Navajo culture he so passionately seeks to preserve.

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